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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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A. Lincoln

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

By

ROBERT G. INGERSOLL



Nothing is grander than to break chains
from the bodies of men — nothing nobler
than to destroy the phantoms of the soul

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

I



ON the 12th of February, 1809, two babes were born—one in the woods of Kentucky, amid the hardships and poverty of pioneers; one in England, surrounded by wealth and culture. One was educated in the University of Nature, the other at Cambridge.

One associated his name with the enfranchisement of labor, with the emancipation of millions, with the salvation of the Republic. He is known to us as Abraham Lincoln.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The other broke the chains of superstition and filled the world with intellectual light, and he is known as Charles Darwin.

Nothing is grander than to break chains from the bodies of men — nothing nobler than to destroy the phantoms of the soul.

Because of these two men the nineteenth century is illustrious.

A few men and women make a nation glorious — Shakespeare made England immortal, Voltaire civilized and humanized France; Goethe, Schiller, and Humboldt lifted Germany into the light. Angelo, Raphael, Galileo, and Bruno crowned with fadeless laurel the Italian brow, and now the most precious treasure of the Great

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Republic is the memory of Abraham Lincoln.

Every generation has its heroes, its iconoclasts, its pioneers, its ideals. The people always have been and still are divided, at least into classes — the many, who with their backs to the sunrise worship the past, and the few, who keep their faces toward the dawn — the many, who are satisfied with the world as it is; the few, who labor and suffer for the future, for those to be, and who seek to rescue the oppressed, to destroy the cruel distinctions of caste, and to civilize mankind.

Yet it sometimes happens that the liberator of one age becomes the oppressor of the next. His

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

reputation becomes so great — he is so revered and worshiped — that his followers, in his name, attack the hero who endeavors to take another step in advance.

The heroes of the Revolution, forgetting the justice for which they fought, put chains upon the limbs of others, and in their names the lovers of liberty were denounced as ingrates and traitors.

During the Revolution our fathers to justify their rebellion dug down to the bed-rock of human rights and planted their standard there. They declared that all men were entitled to liberty and that government derived its power from the consent of the governed. But when victory came, the great principles

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

were forgotten and chains were put upon the limbs of men. Both of the great political parties were controlled by greed and selfishness. Both were the defenders and protectors of slavery. For nearly three-quarters of a century these parties had control of the Republic. The principal object of both parties was the protection of the infamous institution. Both were eager to secure the Southern vote and both sacrificed principle and honor upon the altar of success.

At last the Whig party died and the Republican was born. This party was opposed to the further extension of slavery. The Democratic party of the South wished to make the "divine institution"

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

national — while the Democrats of the North wanted the question decided by each territory for itself.

Each of these parties had conservatives and extremists. The extremists of the Democratic party were in the rear and wished to go back; the extremists of the Republican party were in the front and wished to go forward. The extreme Democrat was willing to destroy the Union for the sake of slavery, and the extreme Republican was willing to destroy the Union for the sake of liberty.

Neither party could succeed without the votes of its extremists.

This was the condition in 1858-60.

When Lincoln was a child his parents removed from Kentucky to

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Indiana. A few trees were felled — a log hut open to the south, no floor, no window, was built — a little land plowed and here the Lincolns lived. Here the patient, thoughtful, silent, loving mother died — died in the wide forest as a leaf dies, leaving nothing to her son but the memory of her love.

In a few years the family moved to Illinois. Lincoln then almost grown, clad in skins, with no woven stitch upon his body — walking and driving the cattle. Another farm was opened — a few acres subdued and enough raised to keep the wolf from the door. Lincoln quit the farm — went down the Ohio and Mississippi as a hand on a flat-boat — afterward clerked in a country

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

store — then in partnership with another bought the store — failed. Nothing left but a few debts — learned the art of surveying — made about half a living and paid something on the debts — read law — admitted to the bar — tried a few small cases — nominated for the Legislature and made a speech.

This speech was in favor of a tariff, not only for revenue, but to encourage American manufacturers and to protect American workingmen. Lincoln knew then as well as we do now, that everything, to the limits of the possible, that Americans use should be produced by the energy, skill, and ingenuity of Americans. He knew that the more industries we had, the greater

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

variety of things we made, the greater would be the development of the American brain. And he knew that great men and great women are the best things that a nation can produce,—the finest crop a country can possibly raise.

He knew that a nation that sells raw material will grow ignorant and poor, while the people who manufacture will grow intelligent and rich. To dig, to chop, to plow, requires more muscle than mind, more strength than thought.

To invent, to manufacture, to take advantage of the forces of nature—this requires thought, talent, genius. This develops the brain and gives wings to the imagination.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

It is better for Americans to purchase from Americans, even if the things purchased cost more.

If we purchase a ton of steel rails from England for twenty dollars, then we have the rails and England the money. But if we buy a ton of steel rails from an American for twenty-five dollars, then America has both the rails and the money.

Judging from the present universal depression and the recent elections, Lincoln, in his first speech, stood on solid rock and was absolutely right. Lincoln was educated in the University of Nature — educated by cloud and star — by field and winding stream — by billowed plains and solemn forests — by morning's birth and death of

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

day — by storm and night — by the ever eager Spring — by Summer's wealth of leaf and vine and flower — the sad and transient glories of the Autumn woods — and Winter, builder of home and fireside, and whose storms without create the social warmth within.

He was perfectly acquainted with the political questions of the day — heard them discussed at taverns and country stores, at voting places and courts and on the stump. He knew all the arguments for and against, and no man of his time was better equipped for intellectual conflict. He knew the average mind — the thoughts of the people, the hopes and prejudices of his fellow-men. He had the power

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

of accurate statement. He was logical, candid, and sincere. In addition, he had the "touch of nature that makes the whole world kin."

In 1858 he was a candidate for the Senate against Stephen A. Douglas.

The extreme Democrats would not vote for Douglas, but the extreme Republicans did vote for Lincoln. Lincoln occupied the middle ground, and was the compromise candidate of his own party. He had lived for many years in the intellectual territory of compromise—in a part of our country settled by Northern and Southern men—where Northern and Southern ideas met, and the ideas of the

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

two sections were brought together and compared.

The sympathies of Lincoln, his ties of kindred, were with the South. His convictions, his sense of justice, and his ideals were with the North. He knew the horrors of slavery, and he felt the unspeakable ecstasies and glories of freedom. He had the kindness, the gentleness, of true greatness, and he could not have been a master; he had the manhood and independence of true greatness, and he could not have been a slave. He was just, and was incapable of putting a burden upon others that he himself would not willingly bear.


He was merciful and profound, and it was not necessary for him

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

to read the history of the world to know that liberty and slavery could not live in the same nation, or in the same brain. Lincoln was a statesman. And there is this difference between a politician and a statesman. A politician schemes and works in every way to make the people do something for him. A statesman wishes to do something for the people. With him place and power are means to an end, and the end is the good of his country.

In this campaign Lincoln demonstrated three things—first, that he was the intellectual superior of his opponent; second, that he was right; and third, that a majority of the voters of Illinois were on his side.

II

N 1860 the Republic reached a crisis. The conflict between liberty and slavery could no longer be delayed. For three-quarters of a century the forces had been gathering for the battle.

After the Revolution, principle was sacrificed for the sake of gain. The Constitution contradicted the Declaration. Liberty as a principle was held in contempt. Slavery took possession of the Government. Slavery made the laws, corrupted courts, dominated Presidents, and demoralized the people.

I do not hold the South respon-

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

sible for slavery any more than I do the North. The fact is, that individuals and nations act as they must. There is no chance. Back of every event — of every hope, prejudice, fancy, and dream — of every opinion and belief — of every vice and virtue — of every smile and curse, is the efficient cause. The present moment is the child, and the necessary child, of all the past.

Northern politicians wanted office, and so they defended slavery; Northern merchants wanted to sell their goods to the South, and so they were the enemies of freedom. The preacher wished to please the people who paid his salary, and so he denounced the slave for

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

not being satisfied with the position in which the good God had placed him.

The respectable, the rich, the prosperous, the holders of and the seekers for office, held liberty in contempt. They regarded the Constitution as far more sacred than the rights of men. Candidates for the presidency were applauded because they had tried to make slave States of free territory, and the highest court solemnly and ignorantly decided that colored men and women had no rights. Men who insisted that freedom was better than slavery, and that mothers should not be robbed of their babes, were hated, despised, and mobbed. Mr. Douglas voiced

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

the feelings of millions when he declared that he did not care whether slavery was voted up or down. Upon this question the people, a majority of them, were almost savages. Honor, manhood, conscience, principle—all sacrificed for the sake of gain or office.

From the heights of philosophy—standing above the contending hosts, above the prejudices, the sentimentalities of the day—Lincoln was great enough and brave enough and wise enough to utter these prophetic words:

“A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this Government cannot permanently endure half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved; I do not expect the house to fall; but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

become all the one thing or the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction, or its advocates will push it further until it becomes alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South."

This declaration was the standard around which gathered the grandest political party the world has ever seen, and this declaration made Lincoln the leader of that vast host.

In this, the first great crisis, Lincoln uttered the victorious truth that made him the foremost man in the Republic.

The Republican party nominated him for the presidency and the people decided at the polls that a house divided against itself could

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

not stand, and that slavery had cursed soul and soil enough.

It is not a common thing to elect a really great man to fill the highest official position. I do not say that the great Presidents have been chosen by accident. Probably it would be better to say that they were the favorites of a happy chance.

The average man is afraid of genius. He feels as an awkward man feels in the presence of a sleight-of-hand performer. He admires and suspects. Genius appears to carry too much sail—to lack prudence, has too much courage. The ballast of dullness inspires confidence.

By a happy chance Lincoln was

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

nominated and elected in spite of his fitness—and the patient, gentle, just, and loving man was called upon to bear as great a burden as man has ever borne.

III



HEN came another crisis — the crisis of Secession and Civil war.

Again Lincoln spoke the deepest feeling and the highest thought of the Nation. In his first message he said :

“The central idea of secession is the essence of anarchy.”

He also showed conclusively that the North and South, in spite of secession, must remain face to face — that physically they could not separate — that they must have more or less commerce, and that this commerce must be carried on

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

either between the two sections as friends, or as aliens.

This situation and its consequences he pointed out to absolute perfection in these words :

“Can aliens make treaties easier than friends can make laws? Can treaties be more faithfully enforced between aliens than laws among friends?”

After having stated fully and fairly the philosophy of the conflict, after having said enough to satisfy any calm and thoughtful mind, he addressed himself to the hearts of America. Probably there are few finer passages in literature than the close of Lincoln's inaugural address:

“I am loth to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break, our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory stretching from

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

every battlefield and patriotic grave to every loving heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

These noble, these touching, these pathetic words, were delivered in the presence of rebellion, in the midst of spies and conspirators—surrounded by but few friends, most of whom were unknown, and some of whom were wavering in their fidelity—at a time when secession was arrogant and organized, when patriotism was silent, and when, to quote the expressive words of Lincoln himself, "Sinners were calling the righteous to repentance."

When Lincoln became President, he was held in contempt by the

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

South — underrated by the North and East — not appreciated even by his cabinet — and yet he was not only one of the wisest, but one of the shrewdest of mankind. Knowing that he had the right to enforce the laws of the Union in all parts of the United States and Territories — knowing, as he did, that the secessionists were in the wrong, he also knew that they had sympathizers not only in the North, but in other lands.

Consequently, he felt that it was of the utmost importance that the South should fire the first shot, should do some act that would solidify the North, and gain for us the justification of the civilized world.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

He proposed to give food to the soldiers at Sumter. He asked the advice of all his cabinet on this question, and all, with the exception of Montgomery Blair, answered in the negative, giving their reasons in writing. In spite of this, Lincoln took his own course — endeavored to send the supplies, and while thus engaged, doing his simple duty, the South commenced actual hostilities and fired on the fort. The course pursued by Lincoln was absolutely right, and the act of the South to a great extent solidified the North, and gained for the Republic the justification of a great number of people in other lands.

At that time Lincoln appreciated

ABRAHAM LINCOLN


the scope and consequences of the impending conflict. Above all other thoughts in his mind was this :

“This conflict will settle the question, at least for centuries to come, whether man is capable of governing himself, and consequently is of greater importance to the free than to the enslaved.”

He knew what depended on the issue and he said :

“We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last, best hope of earth.”

IV

HEN came a crisis in the North. It became clearer and clearer to Lincoln's mind, day by day, that the Rebellion was slavery, and that it was necessary to keep the border States on the side of the Union. For this purpose he proposed a scheme of emancipation and colonization — a scheme by which the owners of slaves should be paid the full value of what they called their "property."

He knew that if the border States agreed to gradual emancipation, and received compensation for their slaves, they would be forever lost

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

to the Confederacy, whether secession succeeded or not. It was objected at the time, by some, that the scheme was far too expensive ; but Lincoln, wiser than his advisers—far wiser than his enemies—demonstrated that from an economical point of view, his course was best.

He proposed that \$400 be paid for slaves, including men, women, and children. This was a large price, and yet he showed how much cheaper it was to purchase than to carry on the war.

At that time, at the price mentioned, there were about \$750,000 worth of slaves in Delaware. The cost of carrying on the war was at least two millions of dollars a day,

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

and for one-third of one day's expenses, all the slaves in Delaware could be purchased. He also showed that all the slaves in Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri could be bought, at the same price, for less than the expense of carrying on the war for eighty-seven days.

This was the wisest thing that could have been proposed, and yet such was the madness of the South, such the indignation of the North, that the advice was unheeded.

Again, in July, 1862, he urged on the Representatives of the border States a scheme of gradual compensated emancipation; but the Representatives were too deaf to hear, too blind to see.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Lincoln always hated slavery, and yet he felt the obligations and duties of his position. In his first message he assured the South that the laws, including the most odious of all — the law for the return of fugitive slaves — would be enforced. The South would not hear. Afterward he proposed to purchase the slaves of the border States, but the proposition was hardly discussed — hardly heard. Events came thick and fast; theories gave way to facts, and everything was left to force.


The extreme Democrat of the North was fearful that slavery might be destroyed, that the Constitution might be broken, and that Lincoln, after all, could not be trusted; and at the same time

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

the radical Republican feared that Lincoln loved the Union more than he did liberty.

The fact is, that he tried to discharge the obligations of his great office, knowing from the first that slavery must perish. The course pursued by Lincoln was so gentle, so kind and persistent, so wise and logical, that millions of Northern Democrats sprang to the defence, not only of the Union, but of his administration. Lincoln refused to be led or hurried by Fremont or Hunter, by Greeley or Sumner. From first to last he was the real leader, and he kept step with events.

V

N the 22d of July, 1862, Lincoln sent word to the members of his cabinet that he wished to see them. It so happened that Secretary Chase was the first to arrive. He found Lincoln reading a book. Looking up from the page, the President said: "Chase, did you ever read this book?" "What book is it?" asked Chase. "Artemus Ward," replied Lincoln. "Let me read you this chapter, entitled *Wax Wurx in Albany*." And so he began reading while the other members of the cabinet one by one came in. At last Stanton

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

told Mr. Lincoln that he was in a great hurry, and if any business was to be done he would like to do it at once. Whereupon Mr. Lincoln laid down the open book, opened a drawer, took out a paper, and said: "Gentlemen, I have called you together to notify you what I have determined to do. I want no advice. Nothing can change my mind."

He then read the Proclamation of Emancipation. Chase thought there ought to be something about God at the close, to which Lincoln replied: "Put it in, it won't hurt it." It was also agreed that the President would wait for a victory in the field before giving the Proclamation to the world.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The meeting was over, the members went their way. Mr. Chase was the last to go, and as he went through the door looked back and saw that Mr. Lincoln had taken up the book and was again engrossed in the *Wax Wux at Albany*.

This was on the 22d of July, 1862. On the 22d of August of the same year Lincoln wrote his celebrated letter to Horace Greeley, in which he stated that his object was to save the Union; *that he would save it with slavery if he could*; that if it was necessary to destroy slavery in order to save the Union, he would; in other words, he would do what was necessary to save the Union.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

This letter disheartened, to a great degree, thousands and millions of the friends of freedom. They felt that Mr. Lincoln had not attained the moral height upon which they supposed he stood. And yet, when this letter was written, the Emancipation Proclamation was in his hands, and had been for thirty days, waiting only an opportunity to give it to the world.

Some two weeks after the letter to Greeley, Lincoln was waited on by a committee of clergymen, and was by them informed that it was God's will that he should issue a Proclamation of Emancipation. He replied to them, in substance, that the day of miracles had passed. He also mildly and kindly suggested

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

that if it were God's will this Proclamation should be issued, certainly God would have made known that will to him — to the person whose duty it was to issue it.

On the 22d day of September, 1862, the most glorious date in the history of the Republic, the Proclamation of Emancipation was issued.

Lincoln had reached the generalization of all argument upon the question of slavery and freedom — a generalization that never has been, and probably never will be, excelled:

“ In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free.”

This is absolutely true. Liberty can be retained, can be enjoyed,

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

only by giving it to others. The spendthrift saves, the miser is prodigal. In the realm of Freedom, waste is husbandry. He who puts chains upon the body of another shackles his own soul. The moment the Proclamation was issued the cause of the Republic became sacred. From that moment the North fought for the human race. From that moment the North stood under the blue and stars, the flag of Nature, sublime and free.

In 1831 Lincoln went down the Mississippi on a flat-boat. He received the extravagant salary of ten dollars a month. When he reached New Orleans, he and some of his companions went about the city.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Among other places, they visited a slave market, where men and women were being sold at auction. A young colored girl was on the block. Lincoln heard the brutal words of the auctioneer—the savage remarks of bidders. The scene filled his soul with indignation and horror.

Turning to his companions, he said, “Boys, if I ever get a chance to hit slavery, by God I’ll hit it hard!”

The helpless girl, unconsciously, had planted in a great heart the seeds of the Proclamation.

Thirty-one years afterward the chance came, the oath was kept, and to four millions of slaves, of men, women, and children, was

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

restored liberty, the jewel of the soul.

In the history, in the fiction of the world, there is nothing more intensely dramatic than this.

Lincoln held within his brain the grandest truths, and he held them as unconsciously, as easily, as naturally, as a waveless pool holds within its stainless breast a thousand stars.

In these two years we had traveled from the Ordinance of Secession to the Proclamation of Emancipation.



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VI



WE were surrounded by enemies. Many of the so-called great in Europe and England were against us. They hated the Republic, despised our institutions, and sought in many ways to aid the South.

Mr. Gladstone announced that Jefferson Davis had made a nation, and that he did not believe the restoration of the American Union by force attainable.

From the Vatican came words of encouragement for the South.

It was declared that the North was fighting for empire and the South for independence.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The Marquis of Salisbury said :
“The people of the South are the natural allies of England. The North keeps an opposition shop in the same department of trade as ourselves.”

Not a very elevated sentiment — but English.

Some of their statesmen declared that the subjugation of the South by the North would be a calamity to the world.

Louis Napoleon was another enemy, and he endeavored to establish a monarchy in Mexico, to the end that the great North might be destroyed. But the patience, the uncommon common sense, the statesmanship of Lincoln—in spite of foreign hate and Northern divi-

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

sion — triumphed over all. And now we forgive all foes. Victory makes forgiveness easy.

Lincoln was by nature a diplomat. He knew the art of sailing against the wind. He had as much shrewdness as is consistent with honesty. He understood, not only the rights of individuals, but of nations. In all his correspondence with other governments he neither wrote nor sanctioned a line which afterward was used to tie his hands. In the use of perfect English he easily rose above all his advisers and all his fellows.

No one claims that Lincoln did all. He could have done nothing without the generals in the field, and the generals could have done


ABRAHAM LINCOLN

nothing without their armies. The praise is due to all — to the private as much as to the officer; to the lowest who did his duty, as much as to the highest.

My heart goes out to the brave private as much as to the leader of the host.

But Lincoln stood at the center and with infinite patience, with consummate skill, with the genius of goodness, directed, cheered, consoled, and conquered.

VII

SLAVERY was the cause of the war, and slavery was the perpetual stumbling-block. As the war went on, question after question arose—questions that could not be answered by theories. Should we hand back the slave to his master, when the master was using his slave to destroy the Union? If the South was right, slaves were property, and by the laws of war anything that might be used to the advantage of the enemy might be confiscated by us. Events did not wait for discussion. General Butler

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

denominated the negro as “a contraband.” Congress provided that the property of the rebels might be confiscated.

The extreme Democrats of the North regarded the slave as more sacred than life. It was no harm to kill the master — to burn his house, to ravage his fields — but you must not free his slave.

If in war a nation has the right to take the property of its citizens — of its friends — certainly it has the right to take the property of those it has the right to kill.

Lincoln was wise enough to know that war is governed by the laws of war, and that during the conflict constitutions are silent. All that he could do he did in the

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

interests of peace. He offered to execute every law — including the most infamous of all — to buy the slaves in the border States — to establish gradual, compensated emancipation; but the South would not hear. Then he confiscated the property of rebels — treated the slaves as contraband of war, used them to put down the Rebellion, armed them and clothed them in the uniform of the Republic — was in favor of making them citizens and allowing them to stand on an equality with their white brethren under the flag of the Nation. During these years Lincoln moved with events, and every step he took has been justified by the considerate judgment of mankind.

VIII



LINCOLN not only watched the war, but kept his hand on the political pulse. In 1863 a tide set in against the administration. A Republican meeting was to be held in Springfield, Illinois, and Lincoln wrote a letter to be read at this convention. It was in his happiest vein. It was a perfect defence of his administration, including the Proclamation of Emancipation. Among other things he said :

“But the proclamation, as law, either is valid or it is not valid. If it is not valid it needs no retraction, but if it is valid it cannot be retracted, any more than the dead can be brought to life.”

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

To the Northern Democrats who said they would not fight for negroes, Lincoln replied :

“Some of them seem willing to fight for you — but no matter.”

Of negro soldiers :

“But negroes, like other people, act upon motives. Why should they do anything for us if we will do nothing for them? If they stake their lives for us they must be prompted by the strongest motive — even the promise of freedom. And the promise, being made, must be kept.”

There is one line in this letter that will give it immortality :

“The Father of waters again goes unvexed to the sea.”

This line is worthy of Shakespeare.
Another :

“Among free men there can be no successful appeal from the ballot to the bullet.”

He draws a comparison between

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

the white men against us and the black men for us :

“ And then there will be some black men who can remember that with silent tongue and clenched teeth and steady eye and well-poised bayonet they have helped mankind on to this great consummation; while I fear there will be some white ones unable to forget that with malignant heart and deceitful speech they strove to hinder it.”

Under the influence of this letter, the love of country, of the Union, and above all, the love of liberty, took possession of the heroic North.

There was the greatest moral exaltation ever known.

The spirit of liberty took possession of the people. The masses became sublime.

To fight for yourself is natural — to fight for others is grand ; to fight for your country is noble —

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

to fight for the human race — for the liberty of hand and brain — is nobler still.

As a matter of fact, the defenders of slavery had sown the seeds of their own defeat. They dug the pit in which they fell. Clay and Webster and thousands of others had by their eloquence made the Union almost sacred. The Union was the very tree of life, the source and stream and sea of liberty and law.

For the sake of slavery millions stood by the Union, for the sake of liberty millions knelt at the altar of the Union ; and this love of the Union is what, at last, overwhelmed the Confederate hosts.


It does not seem possible that

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

only a few years ago our Constitution, our laws, our Courts, the Pulpit, and the Press, defended and upheld the institution of slavery — that it was a crime to feed the hungry — to give water to the lips of thirst — shelter to a woman flying from the whip and chain !

The old flag still flies — the stars are there — the stains have gone.

IX

 LINCOLN always saw the end. He was unmoved by the storms and currents of the times. He advanced too rapidly for the conservative politicians, too slowly for the radical enthusiasts. He occupied the line of safety, and held by his personality — by the force of his great character, by his charming candor — the masses on his side.

The soldiers thought of him as a father.

All who had lost their sons in battle felt that they had his sympathy — felt that his face was as

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

sad as theirs. They knew that Lincoln was actuated by one motive, and that his energies were bent to the attainment of one end — the salvation of the Republic.

They knew that he was kind, sincere, and merciful. They knew that in his veins there was no drop of tyrants' blood. They knew that he used his power to protect the innocent, to save reputation and life — that he had the brain of a philosopher — the heart of a mother.

During all the years of war, Lincoln stood the embodiment of mercy, between discipline and death. He pitied the imprisoned and condemned. He took the unfortunate in his arms, and was the friend even of the convict.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

He knew temptation's strength — the weakness of the will — and how in fury's sudden flame the judgment drops the scales, and passion — blind and deaf — usurps the throne.

One day a woman, accompanied by a Senator, called on the President. The woman was the wife of one of Mosby's men. Her husband had been captured, tried, and condemned to be shot. She came to ask for the pardon of her husband. The President heard her story and then asked what kind of man her husband was. "Is he intemperate, does he abuse the children and beat you?" "No, no," said the wife, "he is a good man, a good husband, he loves me

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

and he loves the children, and we cannot live without him. The only trouble is that he is a fool about politics — I live in the North, born there, and if I get him home, he will do no more fighting for the South.” “Well,” said Mr. Lincoln, after examining the papers, “I will pardon your husband and turn him over to you for safe keeping.” The poor woman, overcome with joy, sobbed as though her heart would break.

“My dear woman,” said Lincoln, “if I had known how badly it was going to make you feel, I never would have pardoned him.” “You do not understand me,” she cried between her sobs. “You do not understand me.” “Yes, yes, I

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

do," answered the President, "and if you do not go away at once I shall be crying with you."

On another occasion, a member of Congress, on his way to see Lincoln, found in one of the ante-rooms of the White House an old white-haired man, sobbing — his wrinkled face wet with tears. The old man told him that for several days he had tried to see the President — that he wanted a pardon for his son. The Congressman told the old man to come with him and he would introduce him to Mr. Lincoln. On being introduced, the old man said: "Mr. Lincoln, my wife sent me to you. We had three boys. They all joined your army. One of 'em has been killed,

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

one's a-fighting now, and one of 'em, the youngest, has been tried for deserting, and he's going to be shot day after to-morrow. He never deserted. He's wild, and he may have drunk too much and wandered off, but he never deserted.

"Tain't in the blood. He's his mother's favorite, and if he's shot, I know she'll die." The President, turning to his secretary, said : "Telegraph General Butler to suspend the execution in the case of —— [giving the name] until further orders from me, and ask him to answer ——."

The Congressman congratulated the old man on his' success — but the old man did not respond. He was not satisfied. "Mr. President,"

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

he began, "I can't take that news home. It won't satisfy his mother. How do I know but what you'll give further orders to-morrow?" "My good man," said Mr. Lincoln, "I have to do the best I can. The generals are complaining because I pardon so many. They say that my mercy destroys discipline. Now, when you get home you tell his mother what you said to me about my giving further orders, and then you tell her that I said this: 'If your son lives until they get further orders from me, that when he does die people will say that old Methusaleh was a baby compared to him.'"

The pardoning power is the only remnant of absolute sovereignty

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

that a President has. Through all the years, Lincoln will be known as Lincoln the loving, Lincoln the merciful.

X



INCOLN had the keenest sense of humor, and always saw the laughable side even of disaster. In his humor there was logic and the best of sense. No matter how complicated the question, or how embarrassing the situation, his humor furnished an answer and a door of escape.

Vallandigham was a friend of the South, and did what he could to sow the seeds of failure. In his opinion everything, except rebellion, was unconstitutional.

He was arrested, convicted by a

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

court martial, and sentenced to imprisonment.

There was doubt about the legality of the trial, and thousands in the North denounced the whole proceeding as tyrannical and infamous. At the same time millions demanded that Vallandigham should be punished.

Lincoln's humor came to the rescue. He disapproved of the findings of the court, changed the punishment, and ordered that Mr. Vallandigham should be sent to his friends in the South.

Those who regarded the act as unconstitutional almost forgave it for the sake of its humor.

Horace Greeley always had the idea that he was greatly superior

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

to Lincoln, because he lived in a larger town, and for a long time insisted that the people of the North and the people of the South desired peace. He took it upon himself to lecture Lincoln. Lincoln, with that wonderful sense of humor, united with shrewdness and profound wisdom, told Greeley that, if the South really wanted peace, he (Lincoln) desired the same thing, and was doing all he could to bring it about. Greeley insisted that a commissioner should be appointed, with authority to negotiate with the representatives of the Confederacy. This was Lincoln's opportunity. He authorized Greeley to act as such commissioner. The great editor

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

felt that he was caught. For a time he hesitated, but finally went, and found that the Southern commissioners were willing to take into consideration any offers of peace that Lincoln might make, consistent with the independence of the Confederacy.

The failure of Greeley was humiliating, and the position in which he was left, absurd.

Again the humor of Lincoln had triumphed.

Lincoln, to satisfy a few fault-finders in the North, went to Grant's headquarters and met some Confederate commissioners. He urged that it was hardly proper for him to negotiate with the representatives of rebels in arms — that

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

if the South wanted peace, all they had to do was to stop fighting. One of the commissioners cited as a precedent the fact that Charles the First negotiated with rebels in arms. To which Lincoln replied that Charles the First lost his head.

The conference came to nothing, as Mr. Lincoln expected.

The commissioners, one of them being Alexander H. Stephens, who, when in good health, weighed about ninety pounds, dined with the President and General Grant. After dinner, as they were leaving, Stephens put on an English ulster, the tails of which reached the ground, while the collar was somewhat above the wearer's head.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

As Stephens went out, Lincoln touched Grant and said: "Grant, look at Stephens. Did you ever see as little a nubbin with as much shuck?"

Lincoln always tried to do things in the easiest way. He did not waste his strength. He was not particular about moving along straight lines. He did not tunnel the mountains. He was willing to go around, and reach the end desired as a river reaches the sea.

XI



ONE of the most wonderful things ever done by Lincoln was the promotion of General Hooker. After the battle of Fredericksburg, General Burnside found great fault with Hooker, and wished to have him removed from the Army of the Potomac. Lincoln disapproved of Burnside's order, and gave Hooker the command. He then wrote Hooker this memorable letter :

“I have placed you at the head of the Army of the Potomac. Of course I have done this upon what appears to me to be sufficient reasons, and yet I think it best for you to know that there are some things in regard to which I am not quite satisfied with

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

you. I believe you to be a brave and skillful soldier — which, of course, I like. I also believe you do not mix politics with your profession — in which you are right. You have confidence — which is a valuable, if not an indispensable, quality. You are ambitious, which, within reasonable bounds, does good rather than harm; but I think that during General Burnside's command of the army you have taken counsel of your ambition to thwart him as much as you could — in which you did a great wrong to the country and to a most meritorious and honorable brother officer. I have heard, in such a way as to believe it, of your recently saying that both the army and the Government needed a dictator. Of course it was not for this, but in spite of it, that I have given you command. Only those generals who gain successes can set up dictators. What I now ask of you is military successes, and I will risk the dictatorship. The Government will support you to the utmost of its ability, which is neither more nor less than it has done and will do for all commanders. I much fear that the spirit which you have aided to infuse into the army, of criticising their commander and withholding confidence

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

in him, will now turn upon you. I shall assist you, so far as I can, to put it down. Neither you, nor Napoleon, if he were alive, can get any good out of an army while such a spirit prevails in it. And now beware of rashness. Beware of rashness, but with energy and sleepless vigilance go forward and give us victories."

This letter has, in my judgment, no parallel. The mistaken magnanimity is almost equal to the prophecy :

"I much fear that the spirit which you have aided to infuse into the army, of criticising their commander and withholding confidence in him, will now turn upon you.

Chancellorsville was the fulfillment.

XII



R. LINCOLN was a statesman. The great stumbling-block — the great obstruction — in Lincoln's way, and in the way of thousands, was the old doctrine of States Rights.

This doctrine was first established to protect slavery. It was clung to to protect the inter-State slave trade. It became sacred in connection with the Fugitive Slave Law, and it was finally used as the corner-stone of Secession.

This doctrine was never appealed to in defence of the right — always in support of the wrong. For

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

many years politicians upon both sides of this question endeavored to express the exact relations existing between the Federal Government and the States, and I know of no one who succeeded, except Lincoln. In his message of 1861, delivered on July the 4th, the definition is given, and it is perfect :

“Whatever concerns the whole should be confided to the whole—to the General Government. Whatever concerns only the State should be left exclusively to the State.”

When that definition is realized in practice, this country becomes a Nation. Then we shall know that the first allegiance of the citizen is not to his State, but to the Republic, and that the first duty of the Republic is to protect the

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

citizen, not only when in other lands, but at home, and that this duty cannot be discharged by delegating it to the States.

Lincoln believed in the sovereignty of the people—in the supremacy of the Nation—in the territorial integrity of the Republic.

XIII



A GREAT actor can be known only when he has assumed the principal character in a great drama. Possibly the greatest actors have never appeared, and it may be that the greatest soldiers have lived the lives of perfect peace. Lincoln assumed the leading part in the greatest drama ever enacted upon the stage of this continent.

His criticisms of military movements, his correspondence with his generals and others on the conduct of the war, show that he was at all times master of the situation —

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

that he was a natural strategist, that he appreciated the difficulties and advantages of every kind, and that in "the still and mental" field of war he stood the peer of any man beneath the flag.

Had McClellan followed his advice, he would have taken Richmond.

Had Hooker acted in accordance with his suggestions, Chancellorsville would have been a victory for the Nation.

Lincoln's political prophecies were all fulfilled.

We know now that he not only stood at the top, but that he occupied the center, from first to last, and that he did this by reason of his intelligence, his humor, his

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

philosophy, his courage, and his patriotism.

In passion's storm he stood, unmoved, patient, just, and candid. In his brain there was no cloud, and in his heart no hate. He longed to save the South as well as North, to see the Nation one and free.

He lived until the end was known.

He lived until the Confederacy was dead — until Lee surrendered, until Davis fled, until the doors of Libby Prison were opened, until the Republic was supreme.

He lived until Lincoln and Liberty were united forever.

He lived to cross the desert — to reach the palms of victory — to

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

hear the murmured music of the welcome waves.

He lived until all loyal hearts were his — until the history of his deeds made music in the souls of men — until he knew that on Columbia's Calendar of worth and fame his name stood first.

He lived until there remained nothing for him to do as great as he had done.

What he did was worth living for, worth dying for.

He lived until he stood in the midst of universal Joy, beneath the outstretched wings of Peace — the foremost man in all the world.

And then the horror came. Night fell on noon. The Savior of the Republic, the breaker of

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

chains, the liberator of millions, he who had “assured freedom to the free,” was dead.

Upon his brow Fame placed the immortal wreath, and for the first time in the history of the world a Nation bowed and wept.

The memory of Lincoln is the strongest, tenderest tie that binds all hearts together now, and holds all States beneath a Nation's flag.

XIV



BRAHAM LINCOLN — strange mingling of mirth and tears, of the tragic and grotesque, of cap and crown, of Socrates and Democritus, of Æsop and Marcus Aurelius, of all that is gentle and just, humorous and honest, merciful, wise, laughable, lovable, and divine, and all consecrated to the use of man ; while through all, and over all, were an overwhelming sense of obligation, of chivalric loyalty to truth, and upon all, the shadow of the tragic end.

Nearly all the great historic characters are impossible monsters,

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

disproportioned by flattery, or by calumny deformed. We know nothing of their peculiarities, or nothing but their peculiarities. About these oaks there clings none of the earth of humanity.

Washington is now only a steel engraving. About the real man who lived and loved and hated and schemed, we know but little. The glass through which we look at him is of such high magnifying power that the features are exceedingly indistinct.

Hundreds of people are now engaged in smoothing out the lines of Lincoln's face — forcing all features to the common mold — so that he may be known, not as he really was, but, according to their

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

poor standard, as he should have been.

Lincoln was not a type. He stands alone — no ancestors, no fellows, and no successors.

He had the advantage of living in a new country, of social equality, of personal freedom, of seeing in the horizon of his future the perpetual star of hope. He preserved his individuality and his self-respect. He knew and mingled with men of every kind ; and, after all, men are the best books. He became acquainted with the ambitions and hopes of the heart, the means used to accomplish ends, the springs of action and the seeds of thought. He was familiar with nature, with actual things, with

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

common facts. He loved and appreciated the poem of the year, the drama of the seasons.

In a new country a man must possess at least three virtues — honesty, courage, and generosity. In cultivated society, cultivation is often more important than soil. A well-executed counterfeit passes more readily than a blurred genuine. It is necessary only to observe the unwritten laws of society — to be honest enough to keep out of prison, and generous enough to subscribe in public — where the subscription can be defended as an investment.

In a new country, character is essential ; in the old, reputation is sufficient. In the new, they find

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

what a man really is ; in the old, he generally passes for what he resembles. People separated only by distance are much nearer together, than those divided by the walls of caste.

It is no advantage to live in a great city, where poverty degrades and failure brings despair. The fields are lovelier than paved streets, and the great forests than walls of brick. Oaks and elms are more poetic than steeples and chimneys.

In the country is the idea of home. There you see the rising and setting sun ; you become acquainted with the stars and clouds. The constellations are your friends. You hear the rain on the roof and

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

listen to the rhythmic sighing of the winds. You are thrilled by the resurrection called Spring, touched and saddened by Autumn — the grace and poetry of death. Every field is a picture, a landscape; every landscape a poem; every flower a tender thought, and every forest a fairyland. In the country you preserve your identity — your personality. There you are an aggregation of atoms, but in the city you are only an atom of an aggregation.

In the country you keep your cheek close to the breast of Nature. You are calmed and ennobled by the space, the amplitude and scope of earth and sky — by the constancy of the stars.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Lincoln never finished his education. To the night of his death he was a pupil, a learner, an inquirer, a seeker after knowledge. You have no idea how many men are spoiled by what is called education. For the most part, colleges are places where pebbles are polished and diamonds are dimmed. If Shakespeare had graduated at Oxford, he might have been a quibbling attorney, or a hypocritical parson.

Lincoln was a great lawyer. There is nothing shrewder in this world than intelligent honesty. Perfect candor is sword and shield.

He understood the nature of man. As a lawyer he endeavored to get at the truth, at the very

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

heart of a case. He was not willing even to deceive himself. No matter what his interest said, what his passion demanded, he was great enough to find the truth and strong enough to pronounce judgment against his own desires.

Lincoln was a many-sided man, acquainted with smiles and tears, complex in brain, single in heart, direct as light; and his words, candid as mirrors, gave the perfect image of his thought. He was never afraid to ask — never too dignified to admit that he did not know. No man had keener wit, or kinder humor.

It may be that humor is the pilot of reason. People without humor drift unconsciously into

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

absurdity. Humor sees the other side — stands in the mind like a spectator, a good-natured critic, and gives its opinion before judgment is reached. Humor goes with good nature, and good nature is the climate of reason. In anger, reason abdicates and malice extinguishes the torch. Such was the humor of Lincoln that he could tell even unpleasant truths as charmingly as most men can tell the things we wish to hear.

He was not solemn. Solemnity is a mask worn by ignorance and hypocrisy — it is the preface, prologue, and index to the cunning or the stupid.

He was natural in his life and thought — master of the story-

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

teller's art, in illustration apt, in application perfect, liberal in speech, shocking Pharisees and prudes, using any word that wit could disinfect.

He was a logician. His logic shed light. In its presence the obscure became luminous, and the most complex and intricate political and metaphysical knots seemed to untie themselves. Logic is the necessary product of intelligence and sincerity. It cannot be learned. It is the child of a clear head and a good heart.

Lincoln was candid, and with candor often deceived the deceitful. He had intellect without arrogance, genius without pride, and religion without cant — that is

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

to say, without bigotry and without deceit.

He was an orator — clear, sincere, natural. He did not pretend. He did not say what he thought others thought, but what he thought.

If you wish to be sublime you must be natural — you must keep close to the grass. You must sit by the fireside of the heart ; above the clouds it is too cold. You must be simple in your speech ; too much polish suggests insincerity.

The great orator idealizes the real, transfigures the common, makes even the inanimate throb and thrill, fills the gallery of the imagination with statues and pictures perfect in form and color, brings to light the gold hoarded

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

by memory the miser, shows the glittering coin to the spendthrift hope, enriches the brain, ennobles the heart, and quickens the conscience. Between his lips words bud and blossom.

If you wish to know the difference between an orator and an elocutionist — between what is felt and what is said — between what the heart and brain can do together and what the brain can do alone — read Lincoln's wondrous speech at Gettysburg, and then the oration of Edward Everett.

The speech of Lincoln will never be forgotten. It will live until languages are dead and lips are dust. The oration of Everett will never be read.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The elocutionists believe in the virtue of voice, the sublimity of syntax, the majesty of long sentences, and the genius of gesture.

The orator loves the real, the simple, the natural. He places the thought above all. He knows that the greatest ideas should be expressed in the shortest words — that the greatest statues need the least drapery.

Lincoln was an immense personality — firm but not obstinate. Obstinance is egotism — firmness, heroism. He influenced others without effort, unconsciously ; and they submitted to him as men submit to nature — unconsciously. He was severe with himself, and for that reason lenient with others.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

He appeared to apologize for being kinder than his fellows.

He did merciful things as stealthily as others committed crimes.

Almost ashamed of tenderness, he said and did the noblest words and deeds with that charming confusion, that awkwardness, that is the perfect grace of modesty.

As a noble man, wishing to pay a small debt to a poor neighbor, reluctantly offers a hundred-dollar bill and asks for change, fearing that he may be suspected either of making a display of wealth or a pretence of payment, so Lincoln hesitated to show his wealth of goodness even to the best he knew.

A great man stooping, not wish-

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

ing to make his fellows feel that they were small or mean.

By his candor, by his kindness, by his perfect freedom from restraint, by saying what he thought, and saying it absolutely in his own way, he made it not only possible, but popular, to be natural. He was the enemy of mock solemnity, of the stupidly respectable, of the cold and formal.

He wore no official robes either on his body or his soul. He never pretended to be more or less, or other, or different, from what he really was.

He had the unconscious naturalness of Nature's self.

He built upon the rock. The foundation was secure and broad.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The structure was a pyramid, narrowing as it rose. Through days and nights of sorrow, through years of grief and pain, with unswerving purpose, "with malice towards none, with charity for all," with infinite patience, with unclouded vision, he hoped and toiled. Stone after stone was laid, until at last the Proclamation found its place. On that the Goddess stands.

He knew others, because perfectly acquainted with himself. He cared nothing for place, but everything for principle; little for money, but everything for independence. Where no principle was involved, easily swayed — willing to go slowly, if in the right direction — sometimes willing to

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

stop; but he would not go back, and he would not go wrong.

He was willing to wait. He knew that the event was not waiting, and that fate was not the fool of chance. He knew that slavery had defenders, but no defence, and that they who attack the right must wound themselves.

He was neither tyrant nor slave. He neither knelt nor scorned.

With him, men were neither great nor small—they were right or wrong.

Through manners, clothes, titles, rags, and race he saw the real—that which is. Beyond accident, policy, compromise, and war he saw the end.

He was patient as Destiny,

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

whose undecipherable hieroglyphs were so deeply graven on his sad and tragic face.

Nothing discloses real character like the use of power. It is easy for the weak to be gentle. Most people can bear adversity. But if you wish to know what a man really is, give him power. This is the supreme test. It is the glory of Lincoln that, having almost absolute power, he never abused it, except on the side of mercy.

Wealth could not purchase, power could not awe, this divine, this loving man.

He knew no fear except the fear of doing wrong. Hating slavery, pitying the master—seeking to conquer, not persons, but prejudices

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

—he was the embodiment of the self-denial, the courage, the hope, and the nobility of a Nation.

He spoke not to inflame, not to upbraid, but to convince.

He raised his hands, not to strike, but in benediction.

He longed to pardon.

He loved to see the pearls of joy on the cheeks of a wife whose husband he had rescued from death.

Lincoln was the grandest figure of the fiercest civil war. He is the gentlest memory of our world.

